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TAGS: PGOV YM  
SUBJECT: SECURITY PUTS A DAMPER ON DEMOCRACY DAY  
DEMONSTRATIONS

REF: SANAA 792

Classified By: Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY. Although thousands demonstrated, the widespread violence anticipated across the south on Democracy Day (April 27) never materialized, in part due to the ROYG's heightened military presence in key cities. Looting and arrests occurred in Mukullah, while noted extremist, now southern supporter Sheikh Tariq al-Fadhli led a rally in Abyan. Although protests in some cities drew large crowds, more attention was focused on the lack of serious clashes between southerners and the ROYG. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) In contrast to predictions made by Southern Movement leaders and members of the ROYG, Democracy Day passed without violence on the scale predicted (Ref A). (Note: The date of April 27, known as "Democracy Day" because it is the date Yemen's Parliamentary elections traditionally are held, also carries significance for the south as the day when a tank battle in Amran in 1994 sparked civil war. End Note.) On April 19, Southern Movement leader General Mohamed Saleh Tammar told PolOff that the movement expected clashes if security forces threatened demonstrators. "We certainly expect violence," Deputy Foreign Minister Muhi al-Deen al-Dhabi told the Ambassador on the morning of April 27. He added that if the southerners destroyed public property, openly displayed weapons or advocated secession, the ROYG's security forces would have to intervene.

¶3. (S/NF) In the governorates of Lahj, Aden and Abyan, "thousands" of demonstrators rallied to the southern cause, the southern media reported. Although reliable estimates are not available, numbers were likely lower than Southern Movement organizers had hoped. Reasons for the lower-key events could include threats from the ROYG to dock the wages of participants, a beefed-up security presence in historical hotspots or political fatigue on behalf of the southern public. According to Abdulkader al-Banna and Nabil Abdul-Hakib at the local NGO Yemeni Observatory for Human Rights (YOHR), the ROYG threatened to withhold the salaries of anyone who participated in scheduled demonstrations, which might have contributed to the smaller numbers. Reports from the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) confirmed that the ROYG put several garrisons on high alert, especially in Aden, Dhale and Zinjibar (Abyan governorate). Abdul-Hakib confirmed press reports of military aircraft keeping an eye on events across the south.

¶4. (C) The most serious incident took place in Mukullah (Hadramout governorate) when, after the scheduled demonstration, protesters reportedly led by President of the National Conference of the Sons of the South (NCSS) Hassan Baum set fire to shops belonging to northerners, according to press reports. At least 25 people were arrested. In Zinjibar (Abyan governorate), a heavy security

presence cast a shadow on the rally, according to YOHR. Sheikh Tariq al-Fadhli delivered a speech in which he called the north an "occupying authority" that continued to increase its aggression against the south, the press reported. Meanwhile, according to the media, Vice President Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi announced in Aden that President Saleh had ordered the ROYG to form committees to address issues that have become rallying cries for the southern cause ) such as the economy, development and jobs.

¶5. (C) Also on April 27, the date originally slated for Parliamentary elections, Parliament passed a one-time extension of its term in office for a period of two years. Only two parliamentarians voted against the measure, both members of the ruling General People's Congress (GPC) party.

COMMENT

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¶6. (S) The heightened ROYG security presence in the southern governorates was likely a major contributor to the lack of violence. Although protests in some cities drew crowds of thousands, more attention was focused on the lack of serious clashes between southerners and the ROYG. The movement will likely look towards National Unity Day (May 22) as another opportunity to take its cause to the streets. END COMMENT.  
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